

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8572
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
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AMCONSUL ADANA
AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
AMCONSUL IZMIR
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EUCOM
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ANKARA 6227

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, PINT, TU
SUBJ: ARMY COMMANDER SELECTION PROCESS HITS POLITICAL SNAGS

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SUMMARY: APPARENT DISAGREEMENT AMONG PRIMIN DEMIREL,
TURKISH GENERAL STAFF CHIEF SANCAR AND PRESIDENT KORUTURK
OVER SELECTION OF ARMY COMMANDER HAS STALLED THE 1977 MILITARY
PROMOTION/ASSIGNMENT PROCESS. PUBLIC INTEREST AND PRESS SPECULA-
TION HAS PEAKED THIS WEEK. SANCAR HAS CRITICIZED PRESS SPECULATION.
ECEVIT AND OTHERS HAVE CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT. THE LOGJAM WILL
PROBABLY BREAK SOON, BUT SOME BITTERNESS WILL PERSIST BECAUSE OF
THE APPARENT DEGREE OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE MILITARY
PROMOTION/ASSIGNMENT PROCESS. END SUMMARY
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1. THE ANNUAL CYCLE OF MILITARY PROMOTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS WHICH
TAKES EFFECT EACH AUGUST 30 IS TRADITIONALLY WATCHED WITH GREAT
INTEREST BOTH BECAUSE OF THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF THE
MILITARY IN TURKEY AND BECAUSE OF THE BELIEF THAT THE OFFICERS
SELECTED FOR THE TOP POSITIONS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN
DETERMINING THE MILITARY ATTITUDE WITH RESPECT TO INTERVENTION

IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS. THE 1977 CYCLE HAS ATTRACTED EVEN MORE INTEREST THAN USUAL BECAUSE OF THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE OFFICER WHO IS SELECTED TO BECOME ARMY COMMANDER WILL EVENTUALLY SECCEED TURKISH GENERAL STAFF CHIEF SANCAR.

2. BY LAW, FORCE COMMANDERS MUST BE SELECTED FROM AMONG FULL (FOUR STAR) GENERALS. BY TRADITION, THE ARMY COMMANDER IS SELECTED FROM AMONG THE COMMANDERS OF THE FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD ARMIES. (OFTEN, BUT NOT ALWAYS, THE SENIOR OF THESE COMMANDERS HAS BEEN SELECTED.) ALSO BY TRADITION, THE SELECTION IS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE AFFECTED BY POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

3. THE PROCESS OF SELECTING THE ARMY COMMANDER WAS COMPLICATED THIS YEAR BY THE UNANTICIPATED EARLY (AND DIRECTED) RETIREMENT OF ARMY COMMANDER NAMIK KEMAL ERSUN JUST FOUR DAYS PRIOR TO THE JUNE 5 GENERAL ELECTIONS. AFTER A SIX-WEEK DELAY, FIRST ARMY COMMANDER ADNAN ERSOZ WAS NAMED ACTING ARMY COMMANDER (REFTEL). SINCE ERSOZ WAS ONE OF THE TWO PRIMARY CANDIDATES FOR THE POSITION OF ARMY COMMANDER (THE OTHER BEING THIRD ARMY COMMANDER ALI FETHI ESENER), IT WAS GENERALLY ASSUMED IN ANKARA THAT HIS SELECTION AS ACTING COMMANDER WAS IN FACT A PRE-SELECTION AS COMMANDER.

4. DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF AUGUST, THE SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL (SMC) MET IN ANKARA TO CONSIDER PROMOTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS. ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE RESULTS OF THAT MEETING ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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GENERALLY KNOWN, THEY HAVE NOT YET BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL GAZETTE, AND UNTIL THEY ARE, THEY ARE NOT OFFICIAL. THE APPARENT REASON FOR THE DELAY IS A DISPUTE AMONG PRIME MINISTER DEMIREL, TGS CHIEF SANCAR, AND PRESIDENT KORUTURK OVER THE QUESTION OF WHO WILL BE THE NEXT ARMY COMMANDER. WE DO NOT KNOW THE BASIS OF THE APPARENT DISAGREEMENT, BUT THE POPULAR VIEW IS THAT PRIME MINISTER DEMIREL (APPARENTLY WITH THE SUPPORT OF HIS COALITION PARTNERS) IS INSISTING THAT THIRD ARMY COMMANDER ESENER BE NAMED ARMY COMMANDER. GENERAL SANCAR IS BELIEVED BY SOME TO PREFER FIRST ARMY COMMANDER ERSOZ. PRESIDENT KORUTURK IS NOT BELIEVED TO HAVE A SPECIFIC PREFERENCE BUT IS RESISTING DEMIREL'S SELECTION ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT IS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. (ERSOZ IS CONSIDERED TO BE PRO-RPP. IT WAS THE 30 DAY ECEVIT GOVERNMENT WHICH PRECIPITATED HIS APPOINTMENT AS ACTING COMMANDER. ESENER IS CONSIDERED TO BE PRO-DEMIREL. HE IS REPORTED--IN SUPPOSED VIOLATION OF THE APOLITICAL TRADITIONS OF THE MILITARY--TO HAVE GIVEN A PLAQUE TO DEMIREL DURING THE LATTER'S VISIT TO THE THIRD ARMY EARLIER THIS YEAR.)

5. LAST WEEK THE RUMOR BEGAN TO CIRCULATE THAT GENERAL KENAN EVREN, COMMANDER OF THE AEGEAN ARMY, WAS EMERGING AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. AGREEMENT WAS APPARENTLY NOT REACHED,

HOWEVER, AND PUBLIC INTEREST AND COMMENT CONTINUED TO GROW. THAT INTEREST WAS FED BY THE FACT THAT PRIMIN DEMIREL DID NOT FLY TO ISTANBUL AUGUST 12 FOR HIS NORMAL MEETING WITH PRESIDENT KORUTURK AND BY THE FACT THAT NO ANSWER WAS FORTHCOMING ON THE QUESTION OF WHO WOULD BECOME ARMY COMMANDER. DURING THE LAST FEW DAYS, PRESS SPECULATION HAS BECOME WIDESPREAD. THIS SPECULATION REACHED PEAK AUGUST 18 WHEN MASS-CIRCULATION HURRIYET GAVE THE STROY FRONT-PAGE TREATMENT UNDER THE BANNER HEADLINE "ARMY COMMANDER IS BEING SOUGHT". LATER THAT DAY, TGS CHIEF SANCAR RELAEASED A STATEMENT IN APPARENT RESPONSE TO THE HURRIEYT STORY. SANCAR'S STATEMENT, WHICH WAS CARRIED AS THE LEAD ITEM ON THE MID-DAY TURKISH RADIO NEWS, EXPRESSED REGRET ABOUT THE "APPEARANCE OF REPORTS IN SOME NEWSPAPERS" WHICH WERE PREJUDICIAL TO THE DUTY OF THE TURKISH ARMED FORCES TO MAINTAIN SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER. CONFIDENTIAL

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HE SAID THAT SUCH REPORTS DAMAGE NATIONAL UNITY AND OFFEND THE ARMED FORCES. SANCAR'S STATEMENT CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THE PRINCIPLE BY WHICH THETURKISH ARMED FORCES FUNCTIONS IS THE "CHAIN OF COMMAND", THE PUBLIC COMMENTARY ON THIS MATTER IS IRRESPONSIBLE AND THAT THE REPORTS ARE UNTRUE.

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6. JUMPING ON THE BAND WAGON, RPP CHAIRMAN ECEVIT ALSO ISSUED A STATEMENT AUGUST 18 IN WHICH HE SAID THAT THE DELAY IN ANNOUNCEMENT OF ASSIGNMENTS WAS CREATING WIDESPREAD ANXIETY IN THE ARMED FORCES CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITY OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROMOTION AND ASSIGNMENTS PROCESS. ECEVIT CONCLUDED HIS STATEMENT BY SAYING THAT THE SAFEGUARD AGAINST POLITICIZING THE PROCESS IS THE EXISTENCE OF A PRESIDENT WHO IS ALSO COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE MILITARY. HE CALLED UPON THE PRESIDENT TO USE HIS POWERS TO ELIMINATE REASONS FOR ANXIETY.

7. DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEPUTY FARUK SUKAN ISSUED A SIMILAR STATEMENT SAYING THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S INSISTENCE ON INVOLVING POLITICS IN THE SELECTION OF THE ARMY COMMANDER WAS CREATING UNEASINESS IN THE ARMED FORCES AND WAS PREJUDICIAL TO THE PRESTIGE OF THE ARMED FORCES. IN PARLIAMENT RPP DEPUTY ORHAN AKBULUT INTRODUCED AN
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INTERROGATORY MOTION DEMANDING THAT PRIME MINISTER DEMIREL EXPLAIN REASONS FOR THE DELAY. (AKBULUT'S INTERROGATORY MOTION TAKES PLACE ON THE AGENDA BEHIND DOZENS OF OTHER INTERROGATORY MOTIONS AND IS NOT REPEATED NOT LIKELY TO BECOME AN ISSUE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE.)

8. PRIME MINISTER DEMIREL FLEW TO ISTANBUL AUGUST 19 TO HOLD HIS NORMAL WEEKLY MEETING WITH PRESIDENT KORUTURK. PRESS SPECULATED THAT THE PROMOTION/ASSIGNMENT QUESTION WOULD BE TAKEN UP AT THAT MEETING. AFTER THE MEETING DEMIREL TOLD WAITING REPORTERS THAT HE HAD NO COMMENT. (AUGUST 18 DEMIREL WAS ASKED ABOUT THE ARMY COMMANDER ASSIGNMENT QUESTION AND SAID HE WOULD NO LONGER ANSWER QUESTIONS "ON HIS FEET".)

9. TURKISH PRESS AUGUST 19 ALSO REPORTS THE EXISTENCE OF ANOTHER DISPUTE WITHIN THE ARMY. LT. GEN. MUSA OGUN, WHO REPORTEDLY HAS NOT BEEN SELECTED FOR PROMOTION AND WILL BE RETIRED AUGUST 30, HAS ALLEGEDLY APPLIED TO THE CHIEF MILITARY PROSECUTOR FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF TGS CHIEF SANCAR'S "INDIFFERENCE TO RUMORS OF A MILITARY COUP THAT CIRCULATED AT THE TIME OF ERSUN'S RETIREMENT. OGUN, WHO AS TURKISH RADIO AND TELEVISION DIRECTOR IN THE PERIOD AFTER THE 1971 COUP BY MEMORANDUM AGAINST DEMIREL, IS CLEARLY IDENTIFIED WITH ANTI-DEMIREL ELEMENTS. ALTHOUGH IT IS THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE THAT HE IS MOTIVATED BY SERIOUS CONCERNS, IT IS MUCH MORE LIKELY THAT HE IS UPSET AT BEING FORCED INTO RETIREMENT AND IS TRYING TO EMBARRASS SANCAR--AND THROUGH HIM DEMIREL.

10. AS AUGUST 30 APPROACHES THE PRESSURE-POLITICAL AND MILITARY--WILL PROBABLY FORCE DEMIREL, KORUTURK AND SANCAR

TO FIND A WAY OUT. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THE MATTER WAS RESOLVED DURING
THE DEMIREL-KORUTURK MEETING TODAY (AUG 19). AFTER THE DECISIONS
ARE MADE AND PROMULGATED, THE OFFICERS FORCED TO RETIRE WILL RETIRE
AND NEW PROMOTEEES WILL TAKE THEIR PLACES. NEVERTHELESS,
THE WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT POLITICS PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE
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1977 PROMOTION/ASSIGNMENT CYCLE WILL PERSIST.
THIS BELIEF MAY WELL COMPOUND THE UNEASY POLITICAL SITUATION
WHICH ALREADY EXISTS IN TURKEY. AT THE SAME TIME, WE BELIEVE IT
IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME POLITICAL
CONSIDERATIONS HAVE PLAYED A ROLE IN TURKISH MILITARY ASSIGNMENTS.
PERHAPS THE MAJOR DIFFERENCE THIS TIME IS THAT THE
PUBLIC AND PRESS APPARENTLY FEEL NO CONSTRAINT ABOUT COMMENTING
ON THE MATTER. JUDGING BY THE STORIES APPEARING IN THE PRESS AUG 19,
SANCAR'S STATEMENT HAD LITTLE DAMPENING EFFECT ON PUBLIC COMMENTARY.
THAT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN THE CASE TEN YEARS AGO.
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